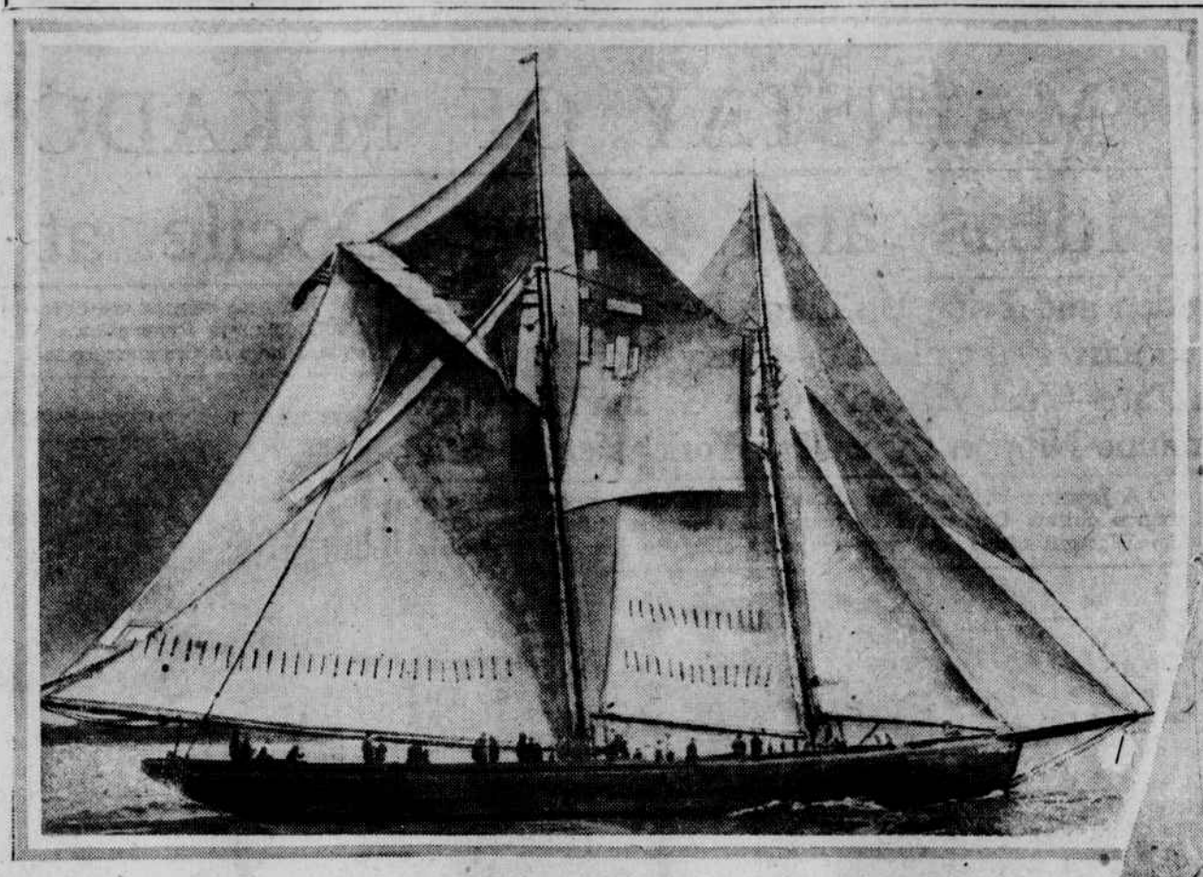
DARING MAKES GLOUCESTER'S FLEET INVINCIBLE

First Hand Tales of Skippers Carrying On in Storm and Stress Reveal Why the Yankee Spirit Conquers in Face of All Odds---International Fishermen's Race May Bring Out Speedy Craft With an Indomitable Captain of the Marty Welch Type---Noted Writer Tells of Many Sporting Chances Taken

JAMES B. CONNOLLY, noted writer of sea tales, presents to The New York Herald Magazine readers to-day a wonderful word picture of the speed and stamina of the Gloucester fishing craft. It will be one of these working fishing schooners that will compete for the cup so gallantly won last year by the Esperanto, since sunk.

Mr. Connolly will report for The Herald the international races of October 22, 24 and 25, off Halifax. His stories of the contest last year are ranked with the classics of marine reporting.

The Esperanto, winner of the fishermen's race last year, as she appeared on her way to Halifax to meet the Canadian champion. She afterward was wrecked and proved a total loss.



By JAMES B. CONNOLLY.

AMERICAN Bank fishermen were always weatherly vessels; they had to be to live through the heavy going that fell to them on the Banks in winter, but they did not become such notably fast vessels as to stand in a class by themselves until after the development of Boston into a great fresh fish market.

Gloucester was primarily a salt fish port; it is still the great salt fish port of the United States, and most of the old Bankers were built to go salt fishing, and if they did take a couple of weeks to come home against a northwester, why no great harm—salt fish could keep.

But fresh fish in the hold, even with plenty of ice aboard, was liable to spoil, especially in hot weather, and besides that there was the matter of top prices in the market. Being first or last of the fleet home sometimes meant the difference between money enough to keep a man's family going for two months or so and not making enough to pay expenses.

Drive for Home in a Breeze Real Test of the Fisherman

And so the fast vessels came to be the regular thing, and they had to be able as well as fast, because that drive to market had to be made in bad weather as well as fine. When two great sail carriers came together for a drive to market in a breeze of wind there was always something for the crews to think about.

I have had airplane and airship experience, been down in submarines and tried bell diving, competed for American and Olympic athletic championships, have heard the enemy shells bursting over my head and the enemy fire whistling around my ears. I have tried many kinds of adventuring since I was a boy, but easily the most exciting item I have to record is a drive to market with a Gloucester or Boston sail carrier in heavy weather.

Those were the trips, when you were likely to be hove from your bunk to the lockers any minute of the day or night, when men to the wheel were always lashed, when the men on forward watch tucked themselves under the lee of the windward dories and never let go their grip of the dory gripes, when hungry men who bunked in the cabin had to watch for an hour sometimes before making their life and death dash to the fo'c'sle for a bite to eat.

Lively?

There were men brought up to the sea who found it altogether too lively for a steady living. Tommie Bohlen, skipper of the Nannie Bohlen, and Joe Rowe of the Joseph Rowe, two famous sail carriers, once drove home together from the Grand Banks. They were hardly tied up to the dock in Gloucester when two men came running up the wharf from them. They almost ran over Mr. Jordan, who was part owner of both vessels.

"What's your hurry?" asked Mr. Jordan.

"I'm through."

"What vessel you in?" asked Mr. Jordan.

"The Rowe."

"What's the matter with Captain Rowe—don't you like him?"

"Captain Rowe's one of the best men ever lived. I never hope to meet a better man than Captain Rowe."

"And what's your trouble?"—to the other. "Don't you like Captain Bohlen?"

"The Lord never made a finer man than Captain Bohlen. Not a thing he's got he wouldn't give one of his crew if they asked him."

"Then what's the trouble?'

"Oh—m-m—well, the Bohlen and the Rowe just been comin' along together three days and nights from the Banks—and some of the old gang said Captain Bohlen wasn't carrying sail. 'Wait till it's real rough and he'll show you some real sail carryin', they said, and I don't want to be aboard her when it's real rough."

"The same way in the Rowe," said the other one. "I don't want any more sail carrying passages with Captain Rowe."

Never Foolishly Reckless, But Often Took Chances

You may think that these driving skippers were foolishly reckless, but they were not. They take chances and sometimes they got caught—carried away a lower spar or got hove down, but they are not foolish—the fact that they remain atop of water so long is the proof of that. They know what their vessel can do with the sea, and they know what the sea can do to them. They are daring, but not foolish.

It is while making their great drives to market in heavy winds and not in formal races that these fishermen do their great sailing. Maurice Whalen once came home from Georges North Shoal to the Boston Lightship—154 miles (sea miles always) in ten hours in the Harry Belden.

The Belden was just 110 feet over all, it was blowing hard and she was rolling down to it with the man to the wheel lashed and being kept busy not to be smothered at times.

As the Belden came swinging up by Cape Cod there was a fleet of big coasters—three, four and five masters—to anchor under the lee of the Cape. They were waiting for it to moderate, so as to make sail and go on to Boston. The mate of one of those coasters was keen on a good sailing vessel. He watched the little fishermen come driving in from sea and made a note of her name as she went flying by.

Next day this mate's vessel made sail and proceeded to Boston. He went around to T Wharf, found the Belden, spent some time looking over her lines and spars, and then asked to see her captain. Whalen was pointed out to him.

"Captain," said the coasting mate, "I watched that little vessel of yours come driving by the other day, she mostly under water, the man to the wheel going sometimes to his waist and sometimes to his chin. What I want to know is: How'd she manage to keep herself afloat?"

Whalen was a great joker. He looked solemnly at the mate: "Well, sir, that's a secret, but I don't mind telling you if you'll keep it to yourself."

"Of course I will."

Whalen motioned for the other to lower his ear. The other did so, and into the waiting ear Whalen whispered: "Maybe you noticed her dories—how they were lashed inboard?"

"Yes."

"And bottom up?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well," whispered Maurice, "it was the air under her lee dories kept her afloat! But don't tell anybody, will you?"

The mate raised his head. "The air under"— Then he eyed Whalen. "Say, you're equal to your vessel. Will you have a drink on me?"

"Keep Her Goin,'" Big Bat's Standing Order to Helmsman

There was another Whalen, the one known as Big Bat, the calmest man I think I ever met with going to sea. He had a great vessel, the Catherine and Ellen, and he was a sail carrier. I made a trip with him once.

"West, nor'west, boy, and keep her goin'," I remember was his word to the helmsman when he swung off for home. That "keep her goin'" was his standing order.

We reached up to Cape Cod that passage home, Big Bat giving all the sail she had in a pretty good breeze. Off Cape Cod a squall hit her.

"Keep her a-full—keep her a-full, boy," said Bat to the man at the wheel. He kept her a-full, and down she rolled.

Some of the gang were playing forty-fives in the cabin when she rolled down. The loose water which came piling up over her quarter rail filled her cabin and drove them out. They came running up on deck looking like a lot of wet seals.

"What're you tryin' to do, skipper—drown us?" asked one of them reproachfully.

"What, drown ye? Let'ye take to the weather rail, and if she goes over, sure it's only a mile to shore."

That everlastingly driving a vessel does loosen her up. Saul Jacobs, in his great Ethel Jacobs, was once making a hard passage. On forward watch was a man Saul had only shipped that trip. He was new to Gloucester and the Ethel was making long leaps from the top of one sea to the top of the other. The Ethel at this time was eight or nine years old and had been driven pretty hard.

This new man forward happened to take a look over her weather bow. He came jumping back aft with his eyes popping. "Skipper, oh, Skipper, her for'ard planks 're all opened up."

Said Saul, turning to the man at the wheel, "Slap it to her on the other tack."

The Belden's bowsprit was so loose that every time she tacked the bowsprit tacked with her.

No harm in that sort of looseness, though. A vessel sails best after she is loosened up. When you feel her deck crawling and she working in and out like an old market basket under your feet—then she's in trim to go along, as any old fisherman will tell you.

And they could go along. I have been in several fishermen that could do better than fifteen knots with a trip of fish in them. I remember the Regina of Boston, Captain Shea, that I once made a trip in.

The Regina was probably the heaviest sparred seagoing vessel for her tonnage that was ever built. To her 125 feet over all length she carried an 80-foot main boom and a 97 foot mainmast. They told wonderful tales of her sailing, which I was ready to believe after what I saw her do myself once.

Capt. Marty Welch (at right), who sailed the Esperanto to victory, and James B. Connolly, noted writer, who reported the international fishermen's race for THE NEW YORK HERALD.

I was coming up from Jamaica to Boston in the big white fruit steamer the Admiral Dewey. As we headed up for Cape Cod from the south this Regina swung in from the eastward. There was only a moderate breeze blowing and she had her mainsail reefed; it was badly torn down near the boom, I learned later. The fruit steamer's schedule called for 14 knots all the way from Jamaica to Boston, and she was making her 14 at this time we swung in behind the Regina.

We thought we would soon overhaul her, she with a reefed mainsail and in that moderate breeze. But we never caught her in the fifty miles to Boston, and she was going along so easily that one of her men stood with one foot on her lee rail, an elbow resting on that knee and his chin comfortably in his hand as he looked back at us.

Now if it had not been the winter season the Regina would have had her topmasts up, and this day she would have been easily carrying both topsails and as well as that whole big mainsail. She was doing 14 knots as it was. After that I was ready to believe the stories they told about her doing 16½ knots, which is 19 land miles an hour.

Here Is Some Real Sailing With Hard Beat to Windward

Tommie Bohlen was credited with averaging better than 15½ knots all the way from Cape Sable to Gloucester in the Nannie Bohlen. Even in his day I saw the Edna Wallace Hopper come sailing into Bay of Islands, on the west coast of Newfoundland. She had come from Bonne Bay, about 100 miles north. She left there with a coast steamer, which they said made a 10½ knot schedule. The wind all that day was dead up the coast. The Hopper had to beat every foot of the 100 miles to the Bay of Islands, and yet she was well inside the bay and to anchor before the coast steamer turned the headland. The Hopper's skipper, Al Malloch, said she could surely make better than 16 knots.

Twenty-five to thirty years ago the pilots of Boston had a fine fleet of schooners. Those were the days before the pilot steamers. In those days each pilot boat was on its own. There was competition. Pilot boats sometimes went as far as Cape Sable to pick up a ship. Speed and ableness were then an asset in a pilot boat. They got to where they thought they were as good as the fishermen. They built one, the Hesper, which they thought could beat any fisherman or anything of her tonnage afloat.

The Delawanna, Canadian champion of 1920. She is typical of the craft built by our northern neighbors. Above is the Saladin, a Gloucester fishing boat of high speed and extreme seaworthiness.

At that time Captain Charlie Harty of Gloucester had a new one, the Fredonia. She and the Hesper raced for a bet of $6,000. The Hesper was the fastest pilot boat ever built, before or since, in America, yet the Fredonia beat her 30 minutes over a 40 mile course. The pilots had a hard time believing it. Thirty minutes! They never expected the world would see a vessel that could beat her 30 minutes.

After her Hesper victory there were fishermen who thought the Fredonia was the last word. And yet Maurice Powers of the Boston fresh fish fleet came into the next fishermen's race with the Carrie Phillips, and ran away from the Fredonia. And later, again, Powers came out with the Ben Phillips, which was faster again than the Carrie. And there were later vessels which could beat the Ben Phillips.

The famous designers of the country, the elder Burgess, then McManus, Crowninshield and the younger Burgess, were hired to design fishermen. But the captains themselves had ideas of what a good vessel should look like; and the builders down to Essex and elsewhere, after studying the moulds of one fast vessel after another, had great ideas, too.

But it was the great sailing skippers looking for unbeatable vessels who put the intensive pressure on. A big fish killer can always find an owner to build him a new vessel. A skipper looking for a new vessel would drop in on his owner and say:

"That vessel I got now is a good one, but if I had one off the same mould with maybe two more frames amidships and fined down a little for'ard, and take that little lump off her quarter and step the mainmast maybe two foot more for'ard and about three foot more boom and peak her up four or five foot. I been watching the Tartar and the Arthur James, and they tell me in her" ——

These men did not talk, metacentric height or the centre of stability, but some of them could take a block of soft wood and whittle out a pretty good model for a fast sailer, and any of them needed only one look at a vessel to go and bet their money for or against her.

A few years back it began to look as if the day of the fast sailing fishermen were going by. Power boats were coming into vogue. It was heartbreaking to see a famous vessel having her big mainsail cut down and a couple of 60 horse-power engines stuck in her; and discouraging to see a fine young fellow come along and ask, not what length of main boom a vessel carried, but how many horse-power she had.

When a year ago the Canadians challenged Gloucester to an international race four or five of the fastest models of fishermen in port had engines installed in them; and that fact made Gloucester hesitate about accepting the challenge. They were given but a week to say "yes" or "no" to the challenge, and there was the expense of taking out the engines, putting in new ballast, cutting a mainsail to the old original sailing plans, and so on, before one of those fast ones could be made ready to race. There were some great, old, big sailers out to sea, but no knowing would they be home in time.

It looked for a few days in Gloucester as if there would be no vessel to take up the challenge; and then in from the Grand Banks came the old Esperanto with a trip of salt fish. She was fourteen years old and people had almost forgot that she ever could sail. But she could sail once. The clever Charlie Harty had her when she was new, and Charlie had never picked any slow ones.

Ben Smith of the Gorton-Pew, her owner, asked Harty if he could get her in trim in time for the race.

Harty put her in trim. He helped to restore the ballast in her himself and then he stood on the dock and looked at her and said, "I think she's right."

Capt. Marty Welch was picked to race her. Marty had never touched her wheel till the day he sailed out to Halifax for the race.

was in that race; by reason of the owner's and skipper's friendship I was one of the Esperanto crew. They picked a good skipper when they picked Welch to race her. He was skilful and he was a driver.

"Under water or atop of it—it's all the same to Marty."

Welch sailed the Esperanto without once letting go the wheel from the time she left the dock till she got back to her dock again—in one race nine hours, in the other ten hours. He did leave the wheel once—to light a cigar. He did not even go below for a mug of coffee during either race. That's a real driver's style.

Marty Welch Alone Sailed Her And Needed No Advisers

Marty Welch gave every order aboard the Esperanto, watching her and watching the other vessel; he studied the course, he judged the wind; his was the strategy. No after guard, no forward guard, no navigator, no board of advisers—himself alone he sailed her.

He won the first race by three miles. For the second race the other fellow took out about half her ballast, batting on light air. She got the light air, and for thirty miles all we saw of her was her stern. Then the wind picked up and we went along. In the last six miles, which was a beat to windward with a fair little wind and sea, we beat her seven minutes.

They gave Marty many fine dinners and parties. Once they coaxed him to make a speech. His speech was: "We had a fine vessel and a great crew. What more could a man want?"

Coming home this spring from the Grand Banks the Esperanto laid her old bones on Sable Island Bar. She is gone where many a good vessel went before, but the story of how they dug her out of the dock mud after her Grand Banks trip, of how she sailed out again, this time to win an international race in the same old patched sails and the same old eighty tons of ballast which she carried through years of hard weather on the fishing banks—that story will be told for many a long day to come.

This year some Boston men built a big vessel, the Mayflower, for this race to come, but she has been barred by the Canadian committee.

The reasons for her barring do not seem sound to me. They say she is not a bona fide fisherman. Rot! She is a fisherman, has done nothing but fish since she was built, and has a regular Gloucester skipper and crew.

She may have been built to win this race, but so did the Canadians build a vessel for this race—two vessels—and built them so much bigger than anything Gloucester ever had that there would seem to be no chance for Gloucester.

Will Gloucester race this year?

She will.

But as I write this Gloucester is in the same position she was in last year. There are some very fast vessels with engines in them and some fast ones out to sea. But leave it to her—she will dig one up even as she did a year ago.

Has she a chance?

Well, it is boat for boat—there is no such thing as time allowance in fishermen's races—and the biggest possibilities Gloucester has will still be sixteen or eighteen feet less in length than either of the two big Canadians and sixteen or eighteen feet less length—it is almost too much.

But Gloucester has hers.